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THE
LIBRARY ASSISTANT

The Official Journal
of the Association of
Assistant Librarians

C O N T E N T S

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THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(Section of the Library Association)

HON. EDITOR: W. B. STEVENSON Hornsey Public Libraries

Announcements

CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

COURSES, SUBJECTS, AND FEES

COURSES, in all sections, are arranged each season to run from April to May of the following year, and from November to December of the following year. The subjects treated, and the respective fees for each section, are as set out below:

Elementary Section.—The Course covers the whole of the Library Association requirements for this section. Fee, £1 13s.

Intermediate Section.—Part 1, Library Classification. Part 2, Library Cataloguing. Total inclusive fee, £2 5s. Either section may, however, be taken separately for a fee of £1 6s. 6d.

Final Section.—Part 1, English Literary History. Fee, £1 13s. Part 2, Bibliography and Book Selection and Historical Bibliography. Fee, £2 3s. 6d. Part 3, Advance Library Administration, including either of the specialized alternatives. Fee, £2 3s. 6d.

Non-members of the Library Association are charged double fees.

Students wishing to enter for any Course must obtain an application form from, and return it, together with the necessary fee, to Mr. S. W. Martin, Carnegie Library, Herne Hill Road, London, S.E.24. Applications must reach the above before 20th March and 20th October for the April and November courses respectively. AFTER THESE DATES NO APPLICATIONS WILL BE CONSIDERED.

❦

The following Courses will be held at the North-Western Polytechnic, Prince of Wales Road, N.W.5, commencing 25th September:

Elementary Examination.

Library Administration, Classification

and Cataloguing Wednesday, 3.0 –4.30 p.m.

Literary History „ 4.30–6.0 p.m.

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Intermediate Examination.

Classification	Wednesday, 3.0 -4.30 p.m.
Cataloguing	" 4.30-6.0 p.m.



Visitations¹

Ethel F. Wragg

GIVEN a sound working car, beautiful weather, a local librarian of amiable temper who knows all about card charging and doesn't mind doing a spot now and again, then one can say with Robert Browning's Pippa:

*"The Lark's on the wing ;
The snail's on the thorn ;
God's in His Heaven—
All's right with the world."*

The fact that one has to notice the things which the otherwise suitable librarian has not done, the sins of omission and commission of the local magnates, for the time being is thrust into the background; and the visit of inspection is undertaken with a light heart.

Unfortunately there is the possibility that the day or evening may not be beautiful; on the contrary, it may be raining hard or, worse still, snowing with a lowering mist that will develop into fog as the darkness descends. The car you hoped to travel in may not be available and the best means of transport may be a train journey for the first hop, followed by a bus, the times for which do not dovetail with the train. A wait of thirty minutes in the fog and snow is not anyone's idea of spending a pleasant evening, but if your appointment has been made it may have to be endured. Added to all these miseries, the person whom you are due to interview may be anything but tractable and possibly has a phobia in relation to all County Officials.

Whatever the prevailing conditions under which centres and branches are visited in County areas, such visits are nevertheless an essential part of the work. In giving the title "Visitations" to these ramblings, I had in mind the definition of the word as "official visits of inspection." Try as one will to make "visiting" into a joy-ride by first of all investing all one's savings past, present, and future in a car, then choosing the long summer-time evenings for most of them and as far as one may, concoct a tour of the rural, interesting, easy areas, the difficult hilly textile areas claim their share of attention, also the congested mining areas of South

¹ A paper recently given to the Yorkshire Division.

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Yorkshire still cry out for books and contacts must be made. Whatever the area, weather, or mode of transport, the inevitable written report must be made and in such a way that when one is asked six months or even years hence trifling details about premises or conduct of the centre, the information will miraculously be sitting in the report.

All visits are not made to the centres, for there are many occasions when Clerks to Councils have to be interviewed with regard to local arrangements, or owners of suitable premises dug out of their lairs and made to offer their halls for the good of the cause at as low a price as possible. This, of course, means that the price should only be a little more than the same owner would expect from a private occupier.

May I say here that in the particular county which I serve, arrangements for the inauguration of local centres have so far been made through the medium of the local Council, be it a Parish Meeting or a Parish, Urban District, or Borough Council. Hence the close association with Clerks to local Councils.

In moving about from one area to another, one finds that Clerks include many types of men and women. My main division would be into two broad classes—(a) those who think their particular district is in great need of a library service, and in order to secure this service are willing to work amicably with the County Authority, and (b) those who may still think that a library service is desirable but who are convinced that nothing good ever came from a County Authority and that a local *ad hoc* library authority is the only possible one.

Borough Clerks, like all other Town Clerks, are accessible. The local Town Hall houses them, and whatever their views on County servants, they can at least be located. Not so Clerks to Urban District or Parish Councils. Within the last few years the reins of local government in these areas appear to have been tightened, and more and more is the practice growing of several Parishes or Urban Districts employing the same solicitor or accountant, versed in local government, as their Clerk. Be it your duty suddenly to find it necessary to consult such an official without a prior appointment, the chase may be interesting, but may result in the usage of much precious petrol without eventually tracking down your man. Recently such was my plight. Work was being carried out at a branch at which the connecting links with the locality had broken down. After a hasty lunch I left my colleagues working against time so that I could consult the Clerk at his office in a town six miles away. At the office I drew a blank—it was not his day at the office, but on that day in the week he worked at home. The day was bright and the afternoon still early, so away I went to his home eight miles away. Here I learned that the collection of rents in the very village the branch concerned was in

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was occupying his attention. His mother having given me his car number and detailed instructions as to the exact Council houses where he could be found, I hopefully set forth to find him. Oh yes, he had been for the rents, but had gone home. The decision I wanted from him was urgent, so as his mother had told me that from 5 p.m. onwards he would be at home my hopes were once more raised by the sight of a telephone booth. But no, the call was unanswered. There remained no other way but to make a detour on our homeward journey and call again at his home. Seven o'clock in the evening seemed to me just the right time when Parish Clerks should sit at home. Well, my sense of the rightness of things was wrong, for he had just set out to attend a Rural District Council meeting in a village some ten miles away. "Ahem! What time, petrol, and energy they do waste in the County," I can see is what you are all thinking. To some extent you will be wrong, for the news of my urgent chasing had spread. At 9.30 a.m. the next morning he rang up and the urgent matters in question were satisfactorily settled. Needless to say, he was a Parish Clerk with whom County officials find it possible to work.

All of you will at some time or another have tried to absorb the textbook theories of issuing books. When I was first introduced to J. D. Brown and Rac, I thought that there were too many ideas and ways of issuing books. Believe me, the reactions to the possibilities in the matter of issuing books cannot in any way be assessed until one has seen the actual attempts of hundreds of honorary librarians.

To say that one and all have been issued with the same written instructions is unbelievable to the uninitiated. Many make attempts to use the borrowers' cards and book cards provided, but the majority scorn the use of a tray for filing purposes. To use cards vertically is an inexplicable mystery to most people. For easy reference they must be flat on the table in various piles, the composition of each pile very often not being known to the user. Constantly the wail goes up, "I like looking after the books, but there is such a lot of clerical work and it takes such a long time to give out the books." A closer examination reveals that although the book card is charged with the borrower's card, the borrower's name is always written on the book card. Put not your trust in simple card charging! The attempt to charge by families is the most familiar. The snag in this is often not realised even when five books are charged to a family and only four are returned. A certain amount of juggling is done with the cards and the books and in the end the librarian triumphantly declares, "There, that's all right now!"

Long before I dreamed of possessing a car, my chief habitually used a County car, complete with chauffeur, for a day's visiting. The programme was prearranged, and appointments made. One day when

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such a programme had been drawn up and various appointments made, she was indisposed and unable to undertake the work. I was deputed to the day's outing. The chauffeur was given the list and we set out on our travels.

The first call was to be made on a teacher-librarian about ten miles from Wakefield. The chauffeur drew up at a school and suggested that this was the place. The mining industry of that area was in the throes of a slump. Out-of-work miners lounged around on each side of the road. They took one look at my new fur cloth coat and grunted. A voice rasped out, "'Oo the 'ell is she?" An even more rasping voice replied, "'Oo does ta expect—another b—— inspector—look at coit she's wearing." By this time I had just managed to get inside the school door and was immediately met by the Head Mistress. No, it was not the C. of E. School, it was the R.C. School. In two minutes I was outside again to run the gauntlet of those bitter eyes and stinging tongues. "Look at 'er, doesn't even go in properly to look at the poor kids and pays a driver an' all just to drive her about."

My affluence, real or assumed, must greatly have tempted Fate on that day. Out of the ten or so centres I visited, four or five were held in schools. At one school the Head Teacher remarked she hoped I was quite well. There was a mumps epidemic and she felt sure several children in school were starting with the disease. Sure enough, within the prescribed three weeks I was down with that most painful of all complaints.

As the work in the County area has grown and developed, more and more efforts are made to visit centres during the library session—it is only from such visits that one can help librarians in routine methods and discover where their chief difficulties lie. I was not prepared, however, to find that the apparent stupidity of one young paid librarian was solely due to vanity. This girl had quite a good school certificate, but never grasped the principle of shelving books in order and frequently gave borrowers the wrong tickets. Time and time again I questioned myself, "How did that little fool pass the school certificate?—she cannot be as stupid as she seems."

On one visit to the centre I placed her desk, much against her will, in a better position so far as the public were concerned. Moving her from the direct light almost put a stop to her work. Then the truth flashed across my mind—all she needed was a pair of spectacles! She owned up that she could read nothing when she was not wearing glasses, but oh! she did look so horrid in them!

Most centres are open only during evening periods. The opening time renders it an impossibility to visit the more distant centres during the issue period. Various details of outstanding books had failed to settle

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themselves in correspondence. I was asked to fix up a day's journey to deal with some of these outstanding matters in the north of the area. A day was chosen, and I set off with an assistant who was conversant with the details of the matters to be settled.

Being a little tired of reeling off eight or nine reports after our return, my companion suggested that I should dictate the reports to her as I drove the car. I did, but I agree with the driving test examiners that driving is a full-time job, and nothing else should be undertaken, even on the quietest of roads.

Throughout the day we were met with open arms. Had the time been at our disposal we could have eaten several good farm meals and have learnt the various histories of the families of our respective hosts. As it was, with our eyes on the clock, we cut our visits as short as possible. One clergyman assured us that his housekeeper had expected us to call about half an hour later for morning coffee. With tongues hanging out we vainly hoped that the morning coffee would be made just a wee bit earlier. Instead of refreshing ourselves we listened to a long harangue on the virtues as a librarian of "my colleague, Miss Blank." At last we were able to mention certain sins of omission. We were assured that my colleague, Miss Blank, would never omit any duties, and as a counter-attack we were asked not to send these modern novels to self-respecting country people, who only liked the well-established writers, such as Dumas and Wilkie Collins.

A prosperous farmer's wife, whose help for the day was our local librarian, said she did not know how anyone in the country found time to read books—there was far too much work to be done. She supposed that people in towns had time for such leisurely occupations, but country people certainly had not.

As the day went on the wind rose and we, unaware of the gradient, ascended a long hill, the gradient of which in its steepest part was 1 in 3½. We crawled up and over the brow, found our objective. Stepping out of the car, we were flung back on its side and then forcibly thrown into the school by the rising wind. Inside the school we found a happy community and a perfectly run centre. Our last call for the day was at the home of a local librarian. He turned out to be a farmer working for his father. We found the village and gaily set out to look for the house. As it was not apparent on driving through the village, we made enquiries. The directions sounded a little complicated, but we certainly did not bargain for a two-mile drive down a cart track, that ended in a field gate. The district was moorland. Rocks protruded through the grass of the fields. The farmhouse was two fields away. Reluctantly we left the shelter of the car and scrambled over the rocks to the farmhouse. As

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we neared the house, the door hospitably opened and a fresh young voice exclaimed as a gust of wind threw us inside, "You must be librarians from Wakefield. I was really expecting you last week, but I couldn't have noticed date particular like!" In spite of his outlandish residence, this librarian was most tractable, and after one or two visits later in the year to his centre during the session, we subsequently found everything in order.

So far I have given you incidents of visits where matters were not as a librarian would wish to find them and the best not made of the available premises. Let me tell you of an incident of another type. A few years ago my chief said to me, "There is a wretched place in the south where everything is wrong. I had intended seeing it again, but have been unable to fit it in. Will you go down during the session and see what you can do? A new librarian has started work there."

I read reports on previous visits and braced myself for a stiff reception from borrowers and librarian. About two months before my visit the librarian had changed. I arrived about ten minutes before opening time. Judge of my amazement to find the new librarian—the Headmaster—sitting at a little table with his issue tray in front of him. He greeted me kindly and courteously, even fetching a chair for me to sit upon. I looked over his issues, which were in apple-pie order, and then I looked round for the books. The centre was small and I had no record of shelving having been supplied. The books, however, were not at first visible, and then I found them on a riband of two shelves about four and a half feet from the ground. The school was crowded—a new school was in course of erection—and in the short time he had been librarian the Head Teacher had superintended his scholars in the making and fixing of this band of shelving above the children's heads.

The borrowers came thick and fast. All behaved well and demurely waited for their tickets before proceeding to the shelves to choose their books.

The librarian sensed that I was pleased with the centre, and remarked that I had not expected to find matters proceeding so well. I acknowledged that I had not, and asked where were the unruly ones. "Ah! that is my secret," said he. "I will not tell you what I did or what I said when I took over this job, but I can tell you that ninety per cent. of former obstreperous borrowers are now using this centre properly." The secret remains with him, but there are still one or two other centres at which I should welcome his services for a week or two.

I think that it will be safe to assert that we are all more or less acquainted with the multitudinous details of the Library Association examination syllabus, yet which of you has ever noticed any reference to

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that most important part of our work, namely, "Approach to the public"? In your minds I wonder which is most important, exact records correct in every detail, a tidy library with every book in its correct place, replete with tempting book displays, with a librarian who knows just the correct textbook answer to most questions; or, on the other hand, an indifferently tidy library with a librarian who has a most charming way of winning the book confidence of his borrowers, be they rich or poor, adult or child.

This question recurred to me forcibly at a very recent visit I made to a branch library. Shortly before Christmas the librarian fell ill. It is a one-man branch. In the morning a report was received from his mother that he would be unable to be at work in the afternoon. A supply was sent from headquarters. On her return she reported that everything was in complete order and the condition of the library excellent. I have seen this particular man at work and have not found any ground for complaint, but have always considered him meticulous and successful in his work. A recurrence of his illness with more serious consequences has necessitated obtaining the services of a temporary supply until he recovers. The supply chosen is a man who is a local government officer, and who ran the centre in the district before the branch was opened. Owing to his other duties, the afternoon sessions have been dropped and all the work of issuing is concentrated in the evenings and Saturday afternoon.

The temporary supply asked for more shelves and more books. Additional books and shelving were sent only a few weeks ago, so we wondered where he proposed to put more. A visit was made, only to find that several hundred new books had been overlooked and the new shelves used as a dumping-ground for returned books. I stayed throughout the evening session and was kept occupied helping at the counter. It was amazing to learn of the confidence which the borrowers had in their temporary librarian. So far as I could gather he knew the exact taste of every borrower and most were content to trust to his recommendations. There was no order in the books on the shelves, and yet he produced all the books which he had promised to individuals, out of his hat, so to speak. My admiration of this remarkable faculty of pleasing man, woman, and child, and in the course of it guiding reading taste, grew as the evening progressed. He is a very well and widely read young man, but I have never before encountered a local government official who at one and the same time commanded respect and confidence from all. Beyond the fact that the issues were correctly recorded, nothing in the room was as I should have wished it to be, and yet the public came in a never-ending stream and were very well satisfied. Perhaps approach to the public is a gift direct from Heaven itself, and so the Library Associa-

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tion cannot find a place for it in the mundane a's and b's of the examination syllabus. Yet since my visit I have thought that the successful carrying out of his method of approach to the public is worth many examination successes in library science. There is, of course, the other side, that such workers make a lot of work for the meticulous ones in checking up on such things as overlooked book stock.

Practically all of us have as a candidate for a particular job undergone that peculiar form of inspection, examination and torment known as an "interview" by Committee. Always one wonders what did the "intelligent" man on the right mean by his question? Sitting on the other side of the table as the official adviser to the Committee, one could almost answer, he probably did not know himself, but was just seeking information.

Usually local committees jib at any form of educational, school, or professional qualifications being required for a part-time post. Having safely conducted the Committee over this hurdle, the County Official is then asked to question the candidates in the light of what the County expect in the job. All goes well for the first two candidates, but when once the Committee has become acquainted with the questions, woe betide the officer who does not question each candidate alike. I attended one interview at which another official questioned the candidates. One candidate proved to be original in replies, and so her statements were pursued by further questioning. She made a good show. As soon as she had been released a member of Committee complained that her literary taste had not been questioned, and that of the preceding candidate, a boy, had been. Although most members had questioned the girl, this member thought she had escaped lightly, and had her brought back to the Committee to be asked the same question as the boy candidate.

On another occasion when I put the professional questions myself the Committee appeared to be keenly interested and their own questions were very much on the mark. My opinion was asked about all the candidates. It was given, discussed and generally agreed upon. In spite of this the candidate who was generally agreed to be rather weak received the most votes. On another occasion a candidate had failed to enter her age on the form. In the interview I asked her what it was. She looked up, she looked down, blushed, tittered, and looked so coy, that an elderly male member of Committee was moved to remind me that it was not usual to ask ladies of adult years their exact age.

A form of visit which may not occur to municipal librarians is the one of "new libraries for old." That is to say, establishing a County Library centre or branch in place of an old village library, usually a Co-operative Society one. The proviso is generally to use what is needed

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of the old stock and dispense with the remainder. After years of contact with these mildewed collections of the past, I should have no compunction personally in sending the lot to be repulped without a pretence of inspection. Friendly relations with localities, however, demand that the volumes shall at least be moved from one place to another in the hope of discovering first editions. Some time during the growth of the Co-operative movement in the last century—I should imagine towards the end—someone drew up a good basic list of books. His successors had not the same knowledge of books. Every Co-operative library seems to have the good basic collection, after which few solid works have been added, but what little revenue has been spent appears to have been expended on remainders or cheap editions of popular fiction.

The first collection I went through received a thorough overhauling. The second, appearing familiar, received a little less individual attention. Now I look for local books and for those which do not appear in every collection and weigh up the merits of these. The known qualities of the other basic lists books makes the task of inspection an easy, even if it is often a very dirty, one.

I wonder if after these peeps into the "gadding about" of a member of a County Library staff you still think visitations a joy-ride. There is, of course, a lot to be said for the change incurred in visiting other localities, but, like all joy-riding, it brings in its wake a great tiredness. County Library work is still in its pioneer stages, so that many visitations are made after a full day's hard work at headquarters. A change may be as good as a rest, but the red lights mark a danger signal as the traffic lights did to me one night when I woke up whilst driving the car to find myself facing red traffic lights that were not on my road home. Of the devices my colleague and I used to keep ourselves awake for the remainder of the fifteen miles to Wakefield, I hope to tell you on another occasion.



Sad Standards

L. A. Halsey

"When I hear the word 'culture' I reach for my revolver."

"KITSCH" is a lovely word; "mush" is the English, but "Kitsch" is aggressive, it not only denotes, but reviles. Greenberg,¹ like the Leavis school, makes the dichotomy: Kitsch-avant garde; Dell-Forster; Stitch-Auden. To us it is not so easy. Perhaps no cultural institution is so Philistine as the average public library. Its sheep are sheep indeed, its goats unmentionable. Since public librarianship began, there has been talk about its relation to culture; endless talk. As with most other subjects, nearly everything has been

¹ "Avant-garde and Kitsch," by Clement Greenberg. *Horizon*, April.

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said. But this War may very likely threaten intellectual standards increasingly as it progresses (cf. the songs popular since the War began, and the state of the drama); so it seems worth while to make some affirmations before we are subsumed in the War machine.

Prerequisites for culture are axes of reference and the ability to choose between alternative experiences. With this in mind, one may criticize the belief so carefully nurtured by publishers, booksellers, and reviewers that it is better to read anything than nothing at all. This is an illustration of what Baker calls in connexion with librarianship the "ground-bait" theory: the idea being that people can be weaned from literary slop to literary solid; so they can—a few of them. But it is hard work: you have to work on them consistently; the slightest relaxation and they backslide. It is like building without a foundation, what Norman Angell calls the "psychological Graham's Law"—the base metal of Kitsch driving out the valid currency of good literature, a fact amply borne out by our experience.

Perhaps libraries started with the wrong principle: the over-emphasis on recreation, the advertised competition with the pubs? Or possibly recreation meant more than pastime in 1850? There is, at any rate, very little of the creative about the "recreative" reading of most modern library users.

No: the two legitimate functions of a library, its only functions worth the outlay of public money, are (a) information and (b) culture, literary, and, to some extent, musical. Recreation is only incidental, and if the word meant what it should mean, it ought to be implied under (b). As it is, it had better be ignored for present purposes. I don't like this word "culture." It is a word which has lost its freshness in modern times; it has become debased in meaning. If you have seen an American publication called *The Book of culture*, you will know what I mean. Surface knowledge, outlines of everything for Everyman. Facts, facts, facts. Straight, manly, hand-on-your-shoulder religion, handing on the torch of Hooker, Milton, and Donne—extinguished. So simple a child could understand it. Your questions answered. What is truth, beauty, reality, time? In twelve easy lessons. So much bandying of names, so little reading of texts. So many books about books, and so much third-hand knowledge. So much acceptance and so little criticism. And it's all called "culture."

Culture isn't facts, isn't knowledge at all. It's an attitude. The object of education is the production of cynics. Exaggerated? Of course. But none the less a better definition than some. And the basis of culture is criticism—constructive *and* destructive (why make the distinction?). Criticism is the basis of taste. Then there is appreciation.

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We are returning to our theme—libraries are primarily concerned, or should be, with literary culture: the novel, poetry, and the drama. Particularly the novel.

One thing cannot be repeated too often: libraries have been going on in a certain way for so long that it is impossible to conceive any radical change in the quality of the "popular" literature provided. A librarian who said, "I am going to have the significant and original novelists, poets, dramatists in my library, and people can go elsewhere for their Dells and Corellis," would have a certain difficulty with his Committee and with the ratepayers of his borough. I cannot believe he would keep his job for long. I think it is simply deceiving ourselves to think that anything like that is going to happen.

But bearing that in mind, and bearing in mind the fact that inferior books outnumber so completely "significant" books, there seems no reason why even the smallest library should not have a large proportion of the relatively few original novels in English, and the best of the translations too. A medium-sized library could do even better. To omit certain authors—say Joyce or Proust or Firbank—from stock because they are unpopular, or to apply sex-censorship to them, is hardly the act of a cultured man.

As for poetry, it is probably the least-used literature section, and generally most librarians fight very shy of spending much money on keeping it up to date. We seem to over-emphasize by habit poor anthologies and the collected works of second-rate poets "mentioned in literary histories" to the exclusion of original modern work. Since my regimental library is weak in bibliographical works of reference, I have nothing to go on, but I imagine one could spend £10 or so and buy a really representative collection of original and formative modern work.

Given a functional book stock with a necessary minimum of "dead wood," we have a foundation on which to build a "cultural centre" round the library. But, please, no "revolutions." "Action," of the dramatic nature dreamed of by most young assistants, is absolutely out of the question: this must be emphasized again and again. Any cultural work the library can do under present conditions depends entirely on the librarian himself: it is his personal task. He must consider himself an artist, and work accordingly.

Perhaps this will bear development. I consider "artist" to cover the two degrees of one state: creating and appreciating. Creating is the most intense, and the rarer, degree, but do not dismiss appreciation as needing no effort. The librarian must work hard at his job of chambermaid to the literary muses. He must realize what the "Culture" is he is guarding at the moment. Clearly, it must appear to even the faintest-

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hearted cynic, observing libraries to-day, that the culture they have inherited, and are engaged in perpetuating, is the false (because shallow) "Culture" of the penny reading, of the "honest artisan" at his Mechanic's Institute, of the evening class, and the correspondence "college." When, in fact, this culture is nothing more than mere knowledge, and surface knowledge at that. But when one points this out, one is accused of snobbery; intellectual snobbery, which is no bad thing anyway.

Our own examinations are quite good examples of unscholarly scholarship, our correspondence classes perhaps better. Now, my conception of the artist in these matters is that he engages frequently in standing and staring, or more likely in sitting in an armchair philosophically doing nothing. The Army has not shaken me one whit from that belief. All the same, he won't do that all the time: an artist, even a non-creative one, works hard. *But in his own time and for his own ends.* This is realized in some academic circles, but not in ours. And even if it were, it is hard to see how the examination system could be supplanted. But it is worth pointing out.

And it is possible to take these things too seriously. For my part, I am all in favour of a cavalier attitude to all restrictions and to all compulsions, including examinations. I am of the cavaliers, and prefer to devote no part of my youth so mercilessly to petty learning as to emerge with the brighter and more irresponsible part of my nonage behind me. I hope at least to save my intuition.

Irresponsibility. That is the key. The badge of youth, the prime cause of ebullience in life and ideas: the lesser Hippocrene. The librarian—as an artist, then, practises a studied irresponsibility? Call it nonchalance. The positive gain is, of course, in imagination, a quality overlooked by those who compile lists of desirable attributes for a librarian. The great argument for imagination in a librarian's make-up is the state of libraries to-day, which really needs little expansion. An objection has been raised several times against putting these principles into practice. It was voiced to me lately by a highly respected chief librarian. He said, "It's far more important for a young librarian to know about book-keeping than to have read Joyce, and that sort of thing." So? Is the artist's outlook incompatible with efficiency, even business efficiency? Personally, I should think it means efficiency, plus imagination, plus foresight; the one correcting the other, resulting neither in extremes of irresponsibility, nor in extremes of efficiency.

One conceives the model librarian, then, as cultured, in tune with modern life, a cavalier as to petty details, a puritan as to sloppiness in design, book-selection, extension work, typography, and so on; and above everything, as imaginative. His library is well designed, well decorated,

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comfortable, and free from the more annoying restrictions; his book stock reflects himself, and is therefore also imaginative and sane, his staff well selected and sharing his general culture, if not his opinions. How this crazy world of Proms. and bombs, property and poverty, Schoenberg and Reichsender Hamburg would receive him is another matter. One thing: he must not retreat into an "ivory tower," and glance from his rose-leaf bower at the world and shudder and turn away to spend the remainder of his "days and ways" in the scrutiny of his novel. He must be as hearty and thick-skinned as an artist may be.

This "cultural" work that the librarian may choose to carry out may resolve itself into the encouragement of a small literary coterie of his acquaintances, or at most, of small groups meeting to read and discuss poetry, say; or musical societies: all the familiar clusters of the cultured and their hangers-on, that are a feature of libraries everywhere. But it is worth doing. It is worth trying to work out Mr. Collison's vision of a library as a literary salon, and each success, however small, may decide the ultimate position of English culture and of our profession.

It has been a young man's job, and conscription will have the effect of withdrawing from library staffs a great number of active and civilized men at the height of their enthusiasm. They may come back insensitive morons. If the "psychological Gresham's law" works, it is certain that they will return disillusioned and possibly despondent. It would be a disaster now if those carrying on were to let "the sad standards" glare emptily through the dusty glass in disused galleries.

Clearly, I have said nothing new—there is nothing new to say. To advocate revolutionary action is to make oneself ridiculous. Standards and their maintenance remain a problem for the individual. My desire is simply that librarians should consider themselves among the individuals concerned. High-flown ideals are beside the point. We are neither preachers nor teachers, but that is no reason why we should remain Yes-men in the No-man's-land between striptease and high art.

Valuations

S. H. Horrocks

FOLLOWING my remarks on the neglect of the Gutenberg quincentenary come an article tracing the development of printing, in the autumn, 1939, issue of the *Manchester review*, an article "Five hundred years of printing" in *More books*, Boston public library's bulletin, and a note from the librarian of Bristol.

Manchester was a year in advance of the times, for their exhibition of printing was held in the summer of 1939. It included about thirty Continental incunabula together with examples of work by the Aldine Press, the Estiennes, and the Elzevir Press. Early English printing was

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meagre both here and at Boston, for neither had a Caxton or Wynkyn de Worde—but the later work of the English printers was well to the fore, with many examples by Day, Caslon, Baskerville, and the Strawberry Hill Press. Modern work was, of course, more representative than any of the previous periods. It is a pity that neither of the articles in the Manchester or Boston bulletins pays tribute to the revivalist work of Charles Whittingham, at the Chiswick Press, who brought to light again, in 1848, the "old face" after its period of oblivion.

Boston's exhibition was probably better than any English public library could produce. It began vigorously with a leaf of the Gutenberg Bible and a superb copy of the Poliphilus, 1499; it continued in as effective a manner, and it included, *inter alia*, a copy of the only book extant which was in the library of William Caxton, and signed by him.

The librarian of *Bristol* has kindly written to inform me that an exhibition of printing there had to be withdrawn, as their fine examples of early printing were removed at the beginning of the war to a bombproof shelter some distance away from the central building. They are, however, having a lecture on the subject during the winter.

* * *

Thirteen annual reports are, in this instance, a lucky bag, and they may be divided, in Irish fashion, into two halves, one half being slightly larger than the other. The characteristic is number of issues, and upon shifting the reports into D's and I's (decreases and increases) I number six in the former category and seven in the latter. Most of the reports cover six months of the war (it being twice called the Second European War) and it was only to be expected that the incidence of this catastrophe should receive its unwanted meed of attention. The result is that in those libraries where less reading has been done, quite adequate excuses can be found in the shape of evacuation, less leisure owing to war duties, the calling-up of young men and the general feeling of irritable instability. In those libraries where more books have entered the people's homes, the causes are almost identical, such as evacuation, more leisure owing to the black-out and the need for getting relief from the same irritable instability.

These topsy-turvy excuses, despite the seeming incongruity, are, in reality, quite valid for the districts they cover. Take *Leeds*, for example. An issue of 3,360,312 books is a decrease of nearly half a million from the previous year, yet evacuation and the "leisure-time occupation of adults on various forms of civil defence" undoubtedly caused this decrease, while a paragraph which occurs on page 2 is worth quoting:

"In some quarters the view was expressed that the many to whom, unfortunately, the reading of good books makes no appeal would, in

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a time of stress, have sought the restful relaxation of reading. If there were any such it is to be regretted that few registered at the public libraries of the city."

This pricks a bubble which had already swollen to an uncomfortable size. The remainder of the report is as frank as it is impressive. The new Cross Gates branch registered the only increase of issues in all the city's libraries; books were lent to A.A. batteries and to the various A.R.P. report centres, and the forming of a Central Information Bureau to deal with queries concerning civil defence and war conditions was most promptly and effectively done; to the end of March, 3,981 enquiries had been dealt with.

It is as instructive as going on the Grand Tour to have before you, in addition to *Leeds* just mentioned, the reports of the *Lancashire County Library* and the *Coventry City Libraries*. The former, of an octavo size, has no outward show, and records, in the matter-of-fact way so redolent of great enterprises, an issue of 3,943,440, a fall of 1.4 per cent. (but the branch issues rose by 117,744 to 3,012,168); a stock of 473,168, and 27 per cent. of the population as borrowers. The report, although breathing effective service, nevertheless lacks that ray of humanism which would make the figures live. It is as if "The Rime of the ancient mariner" were written in words other than those of Coleridge, and without his power of charging the scene with a supernatural glow. And there is no financial report.

Coventry's customary printed annual report has become a duplicated one with an attractive Gill Sans cover, printed black on amber. Issues have decreased by 206,733 to just over a million, and a book fund of £2,954 seems low for the service offered, especially with a stock of 190,000 volumes to maintain. The whole report is admirably set out, a tribute both to the compiler and typist.

* * *

Hornsey, Wakefield, and Gillingham, too, record less use of the lending libraries. *Hornsey* note the fact that the quality of reading has deteriorated. This has not happened in many of the libraries whose reports I have read: the tendency has rather been the opposite, in that the times have decreased the fiction issue without affecting the non-fiction. But *Hornsey's* issue was a good one, 652,017, of which 421,978 were fiction; the book fund for three libraries was £2,083 and the item of £4,334 for salaries has a note attached "less paid by Government" which calls attention to the fact that both the librarian and deputy librarian have been seconded to Food Control for the past twelve months. *Wakefield's* report is well "written up": it includes some of that human spirit so

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lacking in most of the reports I have recently studied. A startling fact is that Wakefield's languages class increased by 40 per cent.—but the librarian does not state whether this was the result of a judicious increase of book stock or was just of accidental growth. Gillingham is a county branch with four libraries. The variety of service is as broad as any municipal one, and is, indeed, broader than most. W.E.A. classes were held on Sunday afternoons, books were supplied to schools, N.C.O.s' messes, and hospitals. Exhibitions were held, booklists issued, and the library became a Citizens' Advice Bureau. Altogether, with the normal lending and reference services, an imposing list of activities which betoken both a live spirit and an elastic system.

* * *

The most opulent and by far the most interesting of the seven reports recording increases, is that from *Portsmouth*. A captivating frontispiece depicts in poster fashion, with witty thumb-nail sketches, the whole range of the library service, including both libraries and museum, extension services, war-time services, and other activities. Eagerly one reads the admirable introduction, and truly seductive one finds the diagrams illustrating book issues, and the little men, who have read and read until they are literally black in the face, representing readers. The figures can quickly be given—issues 1,261,574 (a record), book stock 137,540, and 47,933 borrowers. The financial report, the librarian tells me, had to be omitted for want of paper, but for the rest a more effective record of a year's work, despite a lot of Gill, one would seek far to find.

"Luton readers may not be overwhelmingly highbrow, but their taste is solid and not easily stampeded by events." No mean quality, this, in these volatile days, and a subject in which Bacon would have delighted. And Coleridge would have read *Luton's* report with pleasure, for it has none of that "rag-fair finery" he so roundly despised. An issue of 543,103 is an increase of 76,182 over the previous year (and nearly half the increase was in non-fiction); 1,168 tickets were issued to evacuees; books and binding came to £2,338, and cost of library service per inhabitant 1s. 4d. *Rugby's* eight-page report also favours Gill, and the whole is sharply attractive; to a population of 40,000 their issues were high at 350,986, and a book expenditure of 33 per cent. of the total money spent possibly explains this well-merited use.

The report of *Penge* is printed in the Council minutes, it having been decided not to circulate it to the public. This is unfortunate, for the public should have direct evidence that the librarian's salary (as shown in the financial statement) is totally inadequate for the good work put in;

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or is it that Penge is complacently licking its chops over the fact that so much has been accomplished at so little expense? The issues are now up to 1,000 per day, and they are busier than they have ever before been. £609 was spent on books, and black-out curtains cost £28 5s. (Hornsey's cost £111).

* * *

Hove, by Jove, increased their adult readers by 35 per cent., the total number of readers now being 30 per cent. of the population, but tickets are valid for three years, *nota bene*. Issues rose 10 per cent. to 415,217, nearly ten per head of the population. *Darlington's* duplicated report includes the library, museum, and art gallery. The librarian had the happy thought of comparing the book issue for the first seven months of the war with that for the same period of the last war, and the latter is less than a third of the former, 79,117 against 265,382—it is a pity the Boer War totals are not given, for the benefit of the many who still think in terms of that far-off age. *Hornchurch* have presented a neat duplicated report: it covers five district branches. They seem to be as reasonably well served with libraries as the next borough, and they are certainly as well served as an enthusiastic librarian and staff can make it. The war hit Hornchurch badly, for they were to have a branch at Elm Park and the temporary premises which are so inadequate at Hornchurch itself were to be done away with and a transfer made to a more central site. Issues stand at 462,589, and readers number 24,154 (population 93,000), a very good percentage for a semi-urban area.

* * *

The war is having the effect on booklists presaged in these columns more than twelve months ago by Mr. Collison. To begin with, there have been some casualties, while economies have affected all those I am accustomed to perusing: some are issued at less frequent intervals, while nearly all are of a smaller size than they were in the good old days.

But the more meagre they become in size the more arresting their appearance should be. Booklists are the library's shop window, and they should be dressed in as becoming a manner as it is possible to make them. But as the lists are quite frankly as ephemeral as a window dressing there seems to be little value in perpetuating a conservative tradition in size and appearance. A change of colour, new typography, a fresh title-page, and a different angle in presenting the books will surely work wonders in keeping a reader's appetite aroused. *Coventry*, *Croydon*, *Halifax*, *Lancashire County*, *Cheltenham*, and many others obviously are not of this opinion, for they maintain their tradition with regularity. But librarians have a lot to learn, in the way of list production, from such a

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firm as Fortnum & Mason's, whose advertising lists are marvels of style and ingenuity.

From *Halifax* comes the "Reader's guide," and "The Satchel," both having the usual features, the former with a special note on Thomas Hardy. The list of books is shorter than usual (paper-saving), but as good. "The Satchel" is frankly didactic and is issued by the Halifax Education Committee, but should command a wide body of readers locally. *Cheltenham* is pink this month (September), but only just lists *Winterset* (1938), Bernatzik's *Lapland* (1937), *Prisoner in the forbidden land* (1938), *Peaks and lamas* (1939), and *Seen in the Hadhramaut* (1938). St. Pancras' *Have you read . . . ?* is new to me, but is quite fascinating. It is well printed, is meaty, and has all the aplomb in the world. The books listed are roughly classified and introduced by a quotation, which are mostly happy but occasionally rather romantic (such as *Wand'ring from clime to clime* for Geography and Travel).

Darlington's summer booklist is quietly effective, but is printed in a parochial fashion, while the best thing about Wallsend's Additions List is the compliments slip sent with it, the typing and duplicating leaving a lot to be desired. *Wallsend* is the only library I know of who have started a Savings Group—"Save as you borrow."

* * *

The oddments with which Valuations end are much more virile than all the foregoing. *Bristol*, always noted for the charm of its pamphlets, have sent, decked out in Garamond, Public lectures, 1940-41, Talks to children, 1940-41, and a bibliography of Sir Hugh Walpole. The lectures are monthly ones and cover art appreciation, the novel, printing, and, most topical of all, "your food supply." Each lecture is accompanied by a short list of books, which is supplemented, near the date of each lecture, by an exhibition of relevant material in the Reference library. The children's talks, of a somewhat heavier type, will need to be redeemed by a lightness of touch among the speakers.

Ealing's Central Library, housed in a building of the much-admired Georgian period, with some particularly delightful Adam rooms, has had an annexe built on to make a modern lending library. It should definitely be visited by anyone within reach, and the many gadgets, notably an electrically operated moving issue tray, and similar pass gates, will most certainly intrigue, even should they not convince. The exterior of the annexe is delightfully in keeping with the main house, and in the duplicated programme issued for the opening the opinion is expressed that "the brickwork and stonework will weather and tone with the old work in a comparatively short space of time."

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Two items conclude the present batch. *Toronto Public Libraries* have sent their annual "Canadian catalogue of books published in Canada, about Canada, as well as those written by Canadians, with Imprint of 1939." It is a production in a manner typically American, scholarly and full, and by its mere appearance one would conclude it to be complete. If one were confronted by a book not included one would feel impelled to make the remark of the person who first saw the giraffe, "I don't believe it." *Rugby's Junior Library* catalogue is now completed in three parts. The last part has a duplicated text, stiff boards, a cover printed black or green, and embraces Classes 600, 700, and 800, "Men at work," and "Stories." I have made only a superficial check on the bookstock, but all I looked for was there, as was much I had forgotten about but know is essential. It is a grand piece of work, all the more notable in that it has been completed in a time of war.



Current Books: History

GILES ALINGTON. *The Growth of America*. Faber. 12s. 6d.

OUR knowledge of American history is often sadly lacking in detail and in substance, although the Americans have paid us the compliment of studying European culture with great attention. Alington has attempted to bridge the gap between the War of Independence and the Civil War with a study of political development which pays special attention to the trend of relations with Britain. The explanation of the numerous diplomatic "incidents" go far to help understanding of a country with whom we are destined to be "somewhat mixed up."

GORDON EAST. *Mediterranean problems*. Nelson. 2s. 6d.

Written a little before Italy's decision to enter the war, Gordon East's book shows remarkable foresight and judgment in its interpretation of the problems of the countries surrounding the Mediterranean. He points out the great influence which geographical features bring to bear on so many countries which are neither self-supporting nor wholly independent of European politics. The maps and diagrams are especially worthy of note.

F. C. J. HEARNshaw. *Sea power and empire*. Harrap. 10s. 6d.

Professor Hearnshaw is well known for his historical studies, and this new book will add to his reputation. He demonstrates, with historical parallels from the earliest times to the present day, how sea power and

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empire are complementary. His analysis of the importance of sea power to the British Commonwealth is the essential part of the book, and his logical marshalling of fact proves his thesis that the greater the Empire, the greater its navy should be.

A. BERRIEDALE KEITH. *The Causes of the war.* Nelson. 12s. 6d.

Professor Keith, our foremost authority on international affairs, traces the gradual descent of Europe into war from the Versailles Treaty to 1939. The vast knowledge of facts and movements, the meticulous documentation, make this an essential book. The author is no partisan: his irony contains no element of rancour and he holds the scales between Axis claims and Allied policy. The lucid style and the logical arrangement of material add to the value of the book, making it outstanding in every way.

CONSTANTIA MAXWELL. *Country and town in Ireland under the Georges.* Harrap. 18s.

The author of the brilliant *Dublin under the Georges* has now written a complementary study of life outside the Irish capital. The period is full of almost fabulous anecdotes of the eccentricity and inspired nonsense of the impoverished Irish gentry whose wealth was measured in its hosts of relations and knowledge of the classics. There are some well-selected illustrations in this book whose erudition is pleasantly concealed by an interesting style.

MICHAEL PRAWDIN. *The Mongol empire.* Allen & Unwin. 21s.

This exciting history of the Mongols and their emperors Kublai and Genghiz Khan has more than good writing to commend it. The comparison of the Mongol with the Nazi Empire is striking and topical, for the same barbaric ruthlessness, the same tactics of total warfare distinguish both régimes. The author has brought these far-off battles and ancient tyrannies closer to us in a book packed with detailed research, written in a vivid style.

VEIT VALENTIN. *1848: chapters in German history.* Allen & Unwin. 12s. 6d.

The year of revolution and its effect on Germany and Austria is the subject of this book. The author describes the struggles of the democratic parties, the conflict of state against state in Germany, the triumph of the Frankfurt Constitution, the disillusionment and the succeeding counter-revolution. In this decisive year of German history he finds hope for the future. Let us hope, with him, that that patriotism and desire for true freedom evinced in 1848 will soon return to Germany.

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